No. 51

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"God help me!" he groaned. "There is no end to my suffering. I must continue to live with this woman because of a promise I made a dying man."

R. of M. C., No. 81.

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JUMPING up, Gordon reached for the telephone and pressed the receiver to his ear. "This is the Gordon residence." He spoke into the transmitter with unusual gruffness and severity. "What is it?"

"Oh, is this you, Phil?" came back in a troubled feminine voice. "This is Betty talking. Dad took sick suddenly this afternoon and the doctor says he may pass away before the night is over. I want you to bring Alice right away."

Phil did not answer immediately. It shocked him to hear that death threatened his father-in-law. And he did not enjoy the prospect of driving Alice to Chicago.

"Hello—hello!" came anxiously from Betty. "You understood me, didn't you, Phil?"

"Yes, I understood," the latter replied, his mind still a maze of thoughts he could not connect properly. "I'll bring Alice if she'll come. Just now she is getting ready to go to some social affair.

"I am afraid that she will not——"

"She must come!" Betty interrupted him. "Oh, she must. Dad has asked for you both. Please come at once."

"Alright," he acquiesced after some hesitation. "We'll come." Then he hung up the receiver and hurriedly started upstairs.

Chapter 165

JOHN PROCTER'S WILL

TO ALL appearances, old John Procter had reached the end of life's journey. His sunken cheeks, the lusterless eyes and the gasping breath told of the Grim Reaper's approach. Beside him, and holding his hand, sat Betty. The constant quivering of her lips betrayed how she was fighting to keep from crying out loud.

At the foot of the bed stood Bob Harding, her young husband, and Dr. Van Buren. On the faces of the three silent watchers was an expression of awed expectancy.

Occasionally their eyes sought the door. They were hoping that Phil Gordon and Alice would arrive before it was too late; for the obviously dying man had told them that he must see his oldest daughter and her husband before the end came.

At a sign from her father, Betty bent closer so she might catch the words about to slip over his bloodless lips.

"Alice — and — Phil." he gasped brokenly. "Are —they—here?"

"They will be here in a minute now, daddy," she answered choking back a sob. "Phil told me over the phone that they would start for the city at once."

"Go—to the window—and look," John Procter said in a hoarse whisper.

Betty relinquished the hand she had been holding and stepped over to the window. Ashland Boulevard was dotted with fast moving automobiles, but not a sin-

gle one showed an inclination to halt in front of the house.

For ten minutes she waited and watched in breathless suspense, occasionally glancing over her shoulder at the quiet figure on the bed.

"Oh, here they are now, daddy!" she exclaimed when she saw a familiar closed car come to a sudden stop. "Yes, that is Phil," she added with a sigh of relief. "He is helping Alice from the machine."

Hurrying back to the bedside, Betty again reached for her father's hand and patted it gently.

A few moments later Philip Gordon and his wife were ushered into the room. The look on his face was one of grief, while Alice's rouged and powdered features expressed nothing but disappointment.

She had been forced to miss an important social engagement just because her father requested that she must be present when he got ready to draw his last breath.

That was exactly the way this cold, selfish woman felt. He might die just as easy without her, and she hated scenes as these which were bound to occur.

She regarded her younger sister as a sort of an emotional fool.

Betty would be sure to go into hysterics when the end came. And why? Her father was old enough to die. He had enjoyed a long and successful life.

Why should anyone weep because his time had come to say goodby to the world. These and other equally heartless thoughts had dominated Alice's mind during the trip from Oak Manor.

The only thing which made the trip worthwhile to her was the prospect of gaining quick possession of her share of the Procter estate.

For that reason, and no other, she decided to be

as decent as possible at the death bed scene.

As she hurried forward and stood beside her younger sister, she cast a swift glance at her father. There was no longer any anger or resentment in his eyes as they met hers.

They were filled with kindness, mute pleading and something else, Alice could not fathom.

"How are you, daddy?" she inquired as she bent over him and touched his damp forehead with her lips.

"My—last hour—has come," he said in a scarcely audible voice. "Where—is Phil? Bring him — here."

Gordon stepped close. As he reached for his father-in-law's hand, the latter held it in a feeble grasp.

The dying man made a sign for him to lower his head. Alice and Betty withdrew for a moment.

What old John Procter whispered into Gordon's ear caused the latter to straighten up suddenly and utter a forcibly subdued exclamation of horror.

But almost instantly he bent over again and pressed the dying man's hand.

"Don't let that worry you, dad," he said soothingly. "No doubt you were not to blame. I'll promise to do the best I can to make up for that."

Alice and Betty were looking at each other. What did he mean? And what had their father said to Phil to bring such an answer? Of the two Alice was the more curious.

And she was apprehensive, too. And she had indeed reason to be!

John Procter, already having delivered his last message to Betty and her young husband, lay awaiting the end patiently. When a sudden coughing spell seized him, Dr. Van Buren hastened forward to relieve it.

Then, finally, came the beginning of the inevitable. The old gentleman's breath grew shorter, until at last it

grew into spasmodic gasps.

Dr. Van Buren's hand was on the dying man's heart. Betty knelt at the side of the bed, trying to stifle her sobs by burying her wet face in the coverlet.

Alice stood behind her, perfectly composed. Not a sign of emotion showed in her features or general attitude.

Phil Gordon and Bob Harding were silent. Both of them were watching Alice. And then came the physician's final announcement.

"He is dead!" he said very quietly.

Arrangements for John Procter's funeral were being completed. Phil Gordon saw to it that nothing was left undone so that the remains of his father-in-law might be interred in a fitting manner.

What time he had to spare he devoted to comforting the grief-stricken Betty. She apparently could not reconcile herself to the fact that "her dear old daddy," as she fondly used to call him, was dead.

Alice's attitude and conduct presented a harsh contrast.

Practically all of her time was spent running from one Chicago department store to another in order to find a mourning dress and hat to suit her.

Not a single word of regret or sorrow ever crossed her lips. Not a solitary tear did she shed. Her father was dead, and that was the end of it.

The thing of most importance — next to selecting becoming wearing apparel — was the reading of her father's will. This was to be done immediately after her

father's funeral.

Although Phil studiously avoided all personal intercourse with her, she did not seem offended.

On the contrary, she evinced a marked inclination to be alone with him whenever the opportunity offered. But Alice never did anything without a good reason. Burning curiosity drove her in this instance.

What had her father said to Phil just before he breathed his last? It must have been something of vital importance, for Phil rarely displayed such emotion.

But it was not only curiosity which urged Alice on. A feeling as of impending disaster had taken possession of her. She was afraid without being able to give a reason.

Her attitude toward her husband became more and more conciliatory. She gave him to understand through various methods, subtle and coaxing, that she was ready to make up with him.

Gordon refused to give her the chance she so eagerly sought.

He went about grimly, his face like a mask. He had several conferences with Mr. Shields, who had charge of old John Procter's legal affairs.

After each conference he seemed depressed. It was as he returned from the last one that Alice followed him into the library and cornered him.

"Phil," she began in a high pitched voice, "what was the secret my father confided to you before he passed away."

"I am not at liberty to tell you," he replied without looking at her.

"Why not?" Alice demanded.

"Because that unpleasant duty falls on someone else," came back with a sigh.

"Who is that someone else, Phil?"

"Mr. Shields, who drew up your father's last will and who had charge of his affairs."

With these words Gordon evaded his wife by walking out of the library. It was perhaps a rude thing to do, but he felt that he owed no consideration to this cold, selfish woman.

Alice was more disturbed than ever now. She instinctively disliked Mr. Shields. Could it be possible that this lawyer had been instructed by her father to draw up a new will giving the entire estate to Betty?

A sudden wave of bitter resentment swept over her.

"Oh, it wouldn't surprise me very much!" she hissed, her teeth snapping. "Dad never had any love for me. Cutting me off without a dollar when I brought Betty back to him."

She made no attempt to speak to her husband again that day.

The following morning as they sat side by side in the closed limousine that took them to the cemetery where the remains of her father were to be buried, she scarcely looked at Phil. Neither did he favor her with a single glance.

Behind them in a separte closed limousine rode Betty and her husband. Bob Harding was holding his sobbing young wife in his arms, trying his best to comfort her.

"You must not be so unhappy, dear," he soothed. "I know it is hard to lose your father, and I shall miss him almost as much as you do. But we have each other, haven't we? And I'll do all I can to make you forget—to make you happy."

Betty snuggled closer. Her sobbing ceased and she glanced up at her husband with loving eyes.

"Promise me to be brave, darling," he said coax-

ingly. "Promise me that you will not become hysterical when they—when they lower the coffin into the ground. I am afraid I won't be able to stand it."

"I—I won't," she promised.

The last rites at the grave were brief. Betty remained surprisingly composed.

With her handkerchief she pressed back every sob, although her tears flowed freely. Every moment she felt Bob's gentle pressure of her arm.

At the open grave beside them stood Philip Gordon and Alice far apart.

Of these two the former was the only one to display sorrow. His head was bowed and his shoulders shook a trifle.

Some little distance away in the midst of a group of former business associates and friends of the deceased, stood old Mr. Shields, the attorney.

Upon the shoulders of this man had fallen the task of reading John Procter's last will and testament. There was a very peculiar expression in his eyes as they rested upon the coldly beautiful Mrs. Gordon.

He was the only living man intimately acquainted with the history of both, the Procter and the Carey families. He was the only living man who knew that Marie Desmond was Philip Gordon's first wife.

What secrets dwelled in his heart those present at the funeral could never guess.

And fate had picked this man, who was Marie's loyal friend, to deliver a heavy blow to the woman who still reigned as the mistress of Oak Manor.

As the rites at the grave were concluded the immediate members of the family returned to the Procter home on Ashland Boulevard.

The time for the reading of John Procter's will had been set for three o'clock in the afternoon.

Promptly at that hour Mr. Shields arrived, carrying his well-worn brief case. He was ushered into the library by a servant.

Philip Gordon, Alice, Bob Harding and Betty were awaiting him there. He was cordially received by all except Alice.

As he extended his hand to her as a matter of common courtesy, she barely touched it. Her only other sign of recognition was a short glance which conveyed suspicion and defiance.

With grave features Mr. Shields seated himself at the head of the table and began taking several documents out of his briefcase. Finally he rose.

"I am here at this hour," he began, clearing his throat, "to fulfill Mr. John Procter's last wish and act for the last time in a legal capacity for the man whose loss we all mourn."

Dead silence prevailed as the speaker paused.

Betty and her husband were holding hands, while the Gordon's sat far apart.

Alice was tensely alert. She did not look to the right nor left, her eyes fastened on the black, ominous figure of the old lawyer at the head of the table.

"Before reading the last will and testament of the deceased," Mr. Shields went on, "it become my painful duty to inform you that Mr. Procter's financial standing became doubtful toward the end of his earthy career.

"Unwise investments and foolish speculations, coupled with an unfortunate alliance with a questionable brokerage firm, brought about a situation which shocked me as it must shock you.

"It is a tragedy that a man who worked so hard to amass a fortune, should die deeply involved financially. The assets of the once large Procter estate have dwindled to practically nothing. And now I will pro-

ceed with the reading of the will."

Betty and her young husband gazed at one another and they were actually smiling.

There was no disappointment written on their faces. What mattered the possession of wealth to them?

Alice's ghastly features were unpleasant to behold. It seemed that she had quit breathing and she sat tense.

The only thing moving about her were her eyes as she shot a swift glance at her husband. Now she knew the secret her father had confided to Phil. Before he died her father had told Phil of his financial ruin.

But her bitter resentment at her husband's reticence suddenly gave away to the frightful realization that her dream of possessing even half of the Procter fortune had been dispelled. Still she clung to the remnant of her hopes.

Her lips tightened as Mr. Shields began reading her father's last will.

The document was couched in the usual terms, the same stilted legal phrases.

The ending, however, which destroyed even Alice's faint glimmer of hope, ran as follows:

"And after all my creditors have been satisfied, and all outstanding debts have been paid, it is my will that the remainder of the estate shall go to my youngest daughter, Betty.

"To my oldest daughter Alice, I bequeath the old family bible with the prayer that she may spend at least one hour each day reading the holy scriptures."

The last word had barely been uttered when a scream rent the air. Alice threw one hand up and tumbled from her chair in a faint.

Consternation reigned.

It was Phil who first reached her side and with

Bob Harding's assistance they carried her to the couch in the library.

"Quick, Bob, get some water," said Betty.

Bob departed in haste while Betty rubbed her sister's hands, sobbing.

Chapter 166

MUSIC'S CHARM.

MRS. CRAWFORD had taken good care to remove her stepdaughter to a place where any communication between her and Victor Talbot was out of the question. The scheming woman had instructed the young girl's companion that every letter written by Lillian must be sent to her. The place selected was a small town in sunny Florida.

And here, in a cozy cottage, which stood on a slope which led down to the lapping waters of the ocean, lived Lillian Crawford and Marie Desmond.

The regal splendors of the wonderful southern climate were in evidence. The flowers were in full bloom, with hundreds of happy birds singing in the treetops. On the veranda which ran along two sides of the cottage, sat Lillian.

A far-away look was in her eyes, and her hands lay folded in her lap. Occasionally a dry sob broke from her lips. She had lost all appreciation for the beauties nature showered upon her.

The fragrance of the flowers sickened her, and the songs of the feathered host nearby only added to the bitterness that smote her young heart.

Nothing could make up for the bitter fact that she was virtually a prisoner and almost a thousand miles away from the scene where she longed to be.

The bright sunlight hurt her tear-dimmed eyes.

That all of her thoughts should be of Victor Talbot was only natural. Nothing on earth could kill her love for this man. Mrs. Crawford's efforts in that di-

rection had proven an utter failure.

Lillian clung to the man of her choice with daily renewed determination. She would not give him up though he was ten times convicted of murder.

But Victor was innocent. Her own heart told her so every night as she said her prayer before going to sleep. Every morning sun said it.

"How often he must think of me—how he must long for me just as I long for him!" she murmured. "When will he be free at last? Oh, if he were only as far as that! When he comes home, Mrs. Ruggles will give him my letter and he will know that I have been almost violently torn away from him.

"Oh, how happy he will be when he has my letter!" she continued in her soliloquy. "He will start at once to look for me. What bliss, when we meet again! No power on earth shall ever separate us then!"

Filled with hope, she spread out her arms unconsciously as though her loved one stood before her, and she would embrace him.

Poor child; you do not know that your letter never reached the hands of your lover, nor do you think that he may be convicted of a capital crime!

You think it a matter of course that he will be acquitted because you believe in his innocence!

A sound behind her startled Lillian. It was her companion who was approaching.

"Had we not better take a little walk, Lillian? It is so fine to-day and a little exercise would do you good," she said persuasively.

Lillian's lips hardened, her look became dark and cold.

"No," she declined pettishly. "I have no desire to go out."

Marie regarded her with much concern. Two

weeks had passed since they had arrived at the cottage, but notwithstanding the love and kindness which she had bestowed upon Lillian, there was no confidence between them, not even ordinary friendliness.

Marie realized she would have a great struggle to win the girl's heart. At present Lillian's distrust of her was too great, and it seemed best to allow plenty of time until it abated.

While Marie was the very soul of patience and endurance, she was often pained at Lillian's continued attitude toward all her advances. She certainly meant well; she wanted to help the poor girl.

Acting on this desire now, she did not withdraw, but went on seemingly unembarrassed:

"Did you know Lillian, that there is a children's festival in the village to-day? Let us go down and see the little ones at their games and enjoy their good time. If you want to have some fun, take some cake with you for them. What do you say?"

The gloom in Lillian's face did not brighten. Without raising her eyes to Marie, she answered:

"I have already said that I do not care to go out, and least of all could I bear to hear the children's noise. I will stay at home." No person could move her.

Oh how little the unhappy girl knew of a woman's love and friendship!

Symbathy is the magic charm of l[illegible] and a friend will both give it and feel it, and never shrink from speaking truth, however painful, kindly indeed, but faithfully; and will infuse and receive strength by the mutual confidence shared between them.

It was a friend like this Lillian needed; and she had not far to search, for Marie was only too ready to come when she would call!

She was one to cling through weal and woe, never

permitting coldness or distrust to creep in; who would stand by, protecting and comforting in sorrow or pain.

But Lillian did not understand, she did not know.

Silently Marie went inside while Lillian thought bitterly:

"My stepmother certainly knows how to choose her tools. What an insinuating manner this woman has!

"She pretends to be love and kindness itself, but she cannot deceive me. I know she is her paid spy. Now she is sitting inside and writing a report about me to her; the more unfavorable the better she will like it. Oh, how I hate them both!"

Lillian clenched her little hands; she chafed under the authority and power which Mrs. Crawford assumed over her.

She had even deprived her of the sad consolation of hearing something of her lover.

All at once the sound of soft chords came from within and in another moment a beautiful modulated voice, clear as a bell, poured forth a flood of soothing plaintive melody upon the air.

It was a simple little song, expressing meeting and parting, love and sadness; simple, but touching.

Lillian sat entranced, her whole being inexpressibly thrilled. Now, as the musician seemed to play upon her heart-strings, the tears rolled softly over her face and she gave free rein to her memories.

The singing ceased, and the last deep, echoing tones died away. For a few seconds, Marie sat still at the piano, her head sunk in reverie, but soon she arose and stepped noiselessly out on the veranda.

Here she saw Lillian sitting motionless, her face in her hands. The slight quivering of her body showed that she was crying.

Marie did not speak to her.

She would give the young girl time to overcome her lack of confidence and trust. In due season, she felt, she would make the first approaches herself.

Marie's singing had made a deep impression on the girl's sensitive soul.

No longer did she meet the advances of her companion as curtly as before, although the barrier which Lillian had raised herself from the first, was not yet removed.

Miss Desmond, on the other hand, treated her protege with the consideration which is shown to a sick child.

She had not yet succeeded in inducing her to take walks with her companion, nor in awaking any interest in her for the outside world; but she possessed herself in patience.

In this manner the two lived together, each struggling with the sorrows of their own hearts.

A single frank talk would have brought them together, but it was not Marie's place to begin, and Lillian, as we have said, did not show the slightest wish for such a friendly intercourse.

The reader must not blame Lillian too much for her persistent coldness and reserve toward one who she could not help but think was engaged to spy upon her and keep her in check.

Her natural frankness of disposition had been nipped in the bud when the woman her father had married, invaded their home.

Thenceforth she knew no love in her home; and as the girl merged into the woman, her wild and joyous spirits were subdued and there grew a deep capability of suffering and enduring.

There was no one to whom she could lay bare her

heart and thus it was that she had become used to bearing her sorrows alone; for the woman who should have been a mother to her, was nothing but a tyrant.

She could not help but distrust those who tried to win her confidence; her sorry experience at her stepmother's hands had made her retiring and suspicious.

Mrs. Crawford was but seldom heard from. If occasionally Marie received a few lines with an enclosure for Lillian, the latter would quickly scan them and lay them aside.

They were nothing but admonitions to courtesy and obedience to Miss Desmond. Never a kind word did they contain for her.

For the house-work, Marie had hired a young girl from the village who soon worshipped the quiet, gentle woman.

She seemed to read in her eyes what was wanted; and Lillian, too, felt drawn to the girl. There was no deceit in her frank blue eyes.

By degrees, Lillian's stay in this seclusion became a torture. Day and night her thoughts were for her beloved for whom she pined.

She had but one desire; to receive news of him and to let him know where she was and that she was faithful to him.

She did not even know how his case was getting on.

What if he had been unable to establish his innocence, and would have to remain in prison for life!

Anxiety gnawed at her peace of mind and she daily grew thinner and paler.

Marie noted with great apprehension that Lillian's lovely face was growing more delicate and transparent day by day. Was the poor child to perish through her sorrow?

Many a time tears of pity came to Marie's eyes at sight of her. With utmost tenderness, she tried again and again to win the confidence of the poor girl, but her love's labor was in vain.

She noticed lately that Lillian often locked herself in her room, and she redoubled her watchfulness to protect her from a rash step.

One day, she heard Lillian restlessly pacing up and down her room, talking to herself in despair.

The words were quite audible. They were:

"I cannot go on like this forever. If I do not hear from Victor soon I will go mad. Oh, God! what will he think of me if he does not get even a word from me? But to whom can I go so that he may hear from me? I have no one in the world but him. Oh, God, what shall I do!"

Marie was touched to her very heart by these plaints. If she could only convince Lillian of her sincere sympathy for her! But what should she do to reach the heart of the poor oppressed child?

Suddenly she had a thought which she resolved to act upon without delay.

To her great surprise, one day, Lillian found beside her plate at breakfast, a copy of one of the home newspapers. A cry of pleasure escaped her.

For the first time since her coming here her dejected face brightened. Perhaps the p[illegible]r would contain news of her lover!

"I thought you would be glad to hear something from home, and I have ordered the paper for you," remarked Marie.

Lillian did what she had not yet done: she offered her hand to her companion, and she did so with heartfelt gratitude.

With fingers trembling with excitement, she took up the paper and lost herself in its perusal. Nothing

about Victor! Anxious uncertainity over his fate troubled her anew. Why had Miss Desmond ordered the paper? Only to worm her way into her confidence.

Embittered by her sorrows, and made distrustful by her tribulations, the poor girl had quite lost her belief in the innate goodness of humanity.

Chapter 167

ANOTHER CHANCE.

ALICE GORDON was not the kind of a woman to faint no matter how trying the circumstances might be. She had physical strength and willpower. She had the mentality which enabled her to cope with any situation. Her quick wit and keen observation had saved her on many occasions.

But all these advantages failed to keep her from falling into a swoon as she listened to a painful truth almost brutally presented.

Mr. Shields, her departed father's attorney, should perhaps have used a little more tact and consideration when he announced that the entire Procter fortune had been swept away.

To a close observer it would have once become apparent that this old lawyer showed a certain degree of satisfaction in telling Alice that she was a pauper.

And his voice sounded unnecessrily harsh as he read the clause in the will which said that, after all the creditors had been paid, the remainder of the estate was to go to Betty.

All that Alice was to receive was the old family bible, with the injunction that she read several passages of the scripture each and every day.

Even in dying her father had reminded her of her shortcomings and past mistakes. Even in dying he had made it plain that Betty was his favorite child.

Every hope had been cruelly dashed to the ground. It was indeed a frightful blow to Alice, for it placed her in a position she abhorred.

She was now entirely dependent upon Philip Gordon, her husband.

She stood face to face with the cold realization that if she wanted to enjoy the comforts, the pleasures and luxuries of life without earning them by the sweat of her brow, she must continue as the mistress of Oak Manor. It had become compulsory.

Fierce disappointment, anger and hatred, combined to deaden her physical powers for a short space of time.

She had collapsed because the truth was too bitter to bear.

When she came out of her swoon she was lying on the couch in the library and Betty was bathing her face with cold water.

She glanced about quickly. Mr. Shields had gone. Phil and Bob Harding were no longer present. Being alone with her younger sister at this particular moment gave her little pleasure.

Alice sat up with a gasp and pressed both hands against her throbbing temples.

"Oh, I wish I could die!" she moaned.

"Don't say that, dear," Betty objected gently. "I know how you must feel about this. And I am sorry dad used such poor judgement when he drew up that will. The loss of his fortune doesn't mean very much to me.

"Bob seemed even glad that I am poor, and he has urged me not to take a dollar of what is left after all the debts have been paid. Oh, he is a real man, and I am so proud of him."

Envy was added to Alice's disagreeable emotions.

She admitted grudgingly that Betty's husband was pretty much of a man in spite of his lowly origin and station in life.

She had but to look into her younger sister's glow-

ing eyes to see the happiness that never could be hers.

Betty loved her automobile mechanic husband and he worshiped Betty. As Alice silently compared her own married life with that of the Hardings, she could not help but wonder.

"Well," she said, summoning her pride, "I don't care so much about the money. But don't you think it was mean of dad to preach to me even in his will? What must Mr. Shields think—and Bob?"

"I am sure dad did not intend to hurt you," Betty soothed. "He always was kind of preachy."

At this juncture Phil Gordon came in. He smiled pleasantly at Betty, but his handsome face grew stern as his eyes rested on Alice for a moment.

"If you are ready we'll go home," he said coldly.

"I am ready," Alice retorted.

Phil did not wait for his wife, but returned to the living room where Mr. Shields sat talking to Bob Harding.

He said a few words to the latter, shook hands with the lawyer, then left the house.

At the car which stood at the curb, he waited for Alice. A minute or two later she emerged.

She came down the walk with her head bowed and in tears. A tremendous change seemed to have come over her.

The expression on her features and her whole attitude showed that, apparently at least, she was a different woman.

Without a word he assisted her into the closed car, said something to the chauffeur in a low voice, then jumped in and seated himself beside Alice.

The trip back to Oak Manor was one which Alice would never forget.

Phil continued to stare out the window. Not

once did he favor her with a single glance.

Several times Alice made an attempt to start conversation, but the only reply she got was a scarcely audible grunt. Twice she touched his hand, desperate for a sign of him softening toward her.

He drew it away with a gesture which told plainly how he loathed her.

The tears which Alice wept now were tears of real remorse. It was the remorse induced by her utter wretchedness. She needed Phil more now than she ever did before.

But the words: "Get out of my house. You are not fit to be an honest man's wife!" were still ringing in her ears.

They worried Alice tremendously. Did he mean it?

To be compelled to leave Oak Manor now and shift for herself, was not a pleasant prospect to this selfish and extravagant woman.

Not until they were alone at home did Phil speak.

Closing the door of the room to make sure that the servants could not hear him, he said frigidly:

"Perhaps I ought to feel sorry for you, but somehow I can't. You don't deserve sympathy. You did just about what I expected when you fainted as your father's will was being read. That he died meant nothing to you.

"Not a single tear did you shed. I never saw anything more cold and heartless in my life as when you stood at the grave——"

"Please, spare me!" Alice begged piteously. "It is all so unjust. Dad never cared for me. Every word he spoke to me was one of criticism."

"You deserved it," he answered with a shrug of his shoulders. "You father was one of the fairest and squarest men I knew. He was kindness itself, and he would have been kind to you, had you been a little more

like Betty.

"He idolized that girl, and the last thing he said to me before he passed away, was to look after her and her young husband. He had very little to say about you. And what he did say I don't care to repeat."

A speech like this was like acid on a bleeding wound. Alice covered her face with her hands and sank into a chair sobbing bitterly.

Gordon stood watching her with absolute indifference.

He did not think his wife capable of real remorse. And she wasn't. Right now Alice's mind was busy scheming, although her tears flowed continuously.

Her first thought was to prevent being banished from Oak Manor.

"Phil!" she gasped; rising suddenly and holding both hands out toward him. "Will you do something for me?"

He looked her over curiously, a smile of cold mockery on his lips.

"What?" he demanded.

"I know how you must hate me," she went on, her voice low and vibrant. "I—I have no right to complain, for I deserve it. But—but, go over to the library and get your gun. Kill me with it, Phil. Shoot me here!". Her finger indicated a spot over her heart. "Shoot me here, and I'll die gladly!"

"Don't talk like a fool," he retorted. "You are not fit to die."

At this she wept aloud.

For a moment he regarded her in silence. But as Alice showed signs of becoming hysterical, he took her by the shoulders and shook her.

"Come, pull yourself together," he commanded.

"Oh, I can't, Phil," came back sobbingly. "I am

so miserable that I don't care to live any longer. I want to die."

"Go to your room and get over this, Alice." Gordon seized her arm and led the way to the door. His voice softened a trifle as he added: "If you are really sorry for all that you have done, your conduct in the time to come will show it. I shall judge you by that."

This statement was music to Alice's ears. It indicated that her husband at least seemed willing to give her another chance.

"You—you don't want me to go, then, do you?" she breathed, her tear-dimmed eyes focused on his. "Oh, tell me, dear. I'll try so hard to be worthy of you. You loved me once and——"

"Please don't speak of that," Gordon broke in, his face paling. "I am willing to give you a chance because you are the daughter of John Procter. Because you are the sister of Betty. More than that I can not promise. Now get out of my sight. You don't know what this is costing me."

To Alice this was like receiving a gift accompanied by a blow.

With a sharp intake of her breath she left the room and fled to her boudoir. Not another tear did she shed.

With a triumphant flash in her eyes she stepped before the mirror of the dressing table and viewed herself. Yes, she looked beautiful dressed in somber black. She smiled.

Downstairs sat Phil, his head bowed until his chin touched his breast.

"God help me!" he groaned. "There is no end to my suffering. I must continue to live with this woman because of a promise I made a dying man. How can I when my heart cries out for another. Marie — Marie,

how I miss you!"

In the final settlement of the Procter estate it was found that conditions were far worse than expected. The old Procter residence on Ashland Boulevard had to be sold in order to satisfy the creditors.

This left nothing to the heirs. Alice experienced a sense of satisfaction, for it meant that Betty must look to her automobile mechanic husband for support.

She hated her younger sister with constantly increasing vindictiveness, for Phil never missed an opportunity to remind her how he admired Betty's character and generous spirit.

To be the subject of comparison with another woman, when that other is placed on a high pedestal by one's own husband, is not a pleasant thing.

During her girlhood days Alice had been forced to listen to her father raving over Betty. And now it was Phil.

"Oh, if I could only drag her down!" was Alice's one thought and desire. "If I only could show her up. My chance must come, and when it does, Phil will change his mind about Betty!"

It seemed that fate was determined to bring about just such a situation. Bob Harding and his lovely young wife were living in a small flat in Chicago.

His dream of some day owning his own garage had been rudely shattered. All of his saving had been used up in furnishing the flat, for Betty had selected everything with taste and without regard of cost.

He had not objected for he loved his beautiful

young wife with the devotion of a slave.

If Betty wanted a pretty dress, he gave her the money. If she told him that she wanted to entertain some friends in the proper style, he made no objection.

Alice visited them more frequently than Bob Harding enjoyed.

He instinctively disliked his coldly beautiful sister-in-law with her haughty airs and disdainful smiles.

"You don't like my sister, do you, dear?" Betty asked him one day.

Bob flushed uncomfortably.

"I—I wouldn't say that, honey-girl," he answered with evident embarrassment. "Alice is your sister, and I respect her as such."

"But you don't like her," Betty persisted. "Now tell me the truth, Bob."

The latter grinned sheepishly.

"Well, to be honest about it, I don't like her very much," he admitted. "Somehow I don't trust her. Every time I find her here she shuts herself up in a room with you. I just wonder what kind of advise she is giving you."

Betty's sudden blush was one of guilt.

"Whatever Alice tells me is for our good, dear boy," she told him. "Don't you ever worry about that."

But Bob did worry—and he had indeed cause for worry.

Chapter 168

A SISTER'S TREACHERY.

IT SEEMED that history was about to repeat itself. Again dominated by evil, Alice Gordon deliberately sought to destroy her young sister Betty. She had sought to do this very thing when she contrived to bring Bob Harding and Betty together. In this case, however, she was successful only to a degree.

Circumstances and forces over which Alice had no control, combined to obviate what she desired. She succeeded in bringing about an estrangement between Betty and her father and that was all.

We need not review here the deviltry Alice employed in order to keep her father and Betty apart, for it is no doubt still fresh in the reader's memory.

And then, in order to get back to Oak Manor, she used this same Betty as the means to regain what she had lost.

This time Alice was determined to lower her lovely young sister in the estimation of all who knew her, and particularly, Phil Gordon.

What this implied we shall see in the following chapters.

For the time being, Alice was again apparently in good standing at Oak Manor. Her conduct was that of a ultra-respectable married woman.

She took great pains to demean herself with the proper decorum and much grace. She consulted her husband before she made a move socially.

If Phil disapproved of certain people, Alice

ignored them. If he approved, she encouraged them.

There were two separate underlying motives for the complete change in the second Mrs. Gordon.

She had more than suspicion that the governess who called herself "Marie Desmond", was in reality Phil's first wife.

She knew also that Phil had fallen desperately in love with this wonderful creature.

Urged on by necessity as well as the burning desire to remain as the mistress of Oak Manor, she played the part of a dutiful wife with convincing adroitness and skill. And Alice was indeed a very capable actress.

Alice realized that she had not the slightest chance to regain her husband's love — if indeed she ever possessed it.

But she could regain at least some of his confidence by showing that she was sincerely sorry for her conduct in the past.

His confidence was the most essential thing just now, for the success of the plan which had found birth in her astute brain, required a husband's confidence and also his faith.

Her movements in the near future required a certain degree of liberty.

There was no chance of Alice weakening in the dastardly plan she meant to put into execution, for Phil never lost an opportunity to speak admiringly of Betty and her wonderful character.

Each time Alice swore under her breath that her husband's idea of Betty must be changed. Unreasonable hatred drove her on.

Alice was far too shrewd to show her bitter resentment. Neither did she utter a word of complaint when upon Betty's frequent visits, Phil devoted himself entirely to her.

In fact she told Phil with utmost frankness that she enjoyed seeing him treat Betty so nicely.

But underlying that frankness was that hatred which grew with leaps and bounds.

"I'll take her down a few notches!" was Alice often repeated threat. "I know her weakness, and when I get through, Phil won't think so much of 'dear Betty' as he calls her. I am sick and tired of having her paraded in front of me as a perfect model of what a woman and wife should be!"

The first step Alice took in the direction which was to culminate in her sister's moral degradation, was an assumed friendship and keen interest in Betty and her young husband.

Bob Harding did not take very kindly to this because he instinctively mistrusted Alice.

But Betty, unsuspecting, and believing that her older sister was anxious to help elevate her and Bob, readily fell for any suggestion which Alice made.

It was during the week that Philip Gordon had been called to New York on a business matter that Alice took Betty into her confidence.

"I have an invitation to attend a party given by Mr. Fredericks," she told her sister. "I am just crazy to go, but I don't like to go alone. If you go with me, I'll promise you the best time you ever had in your life."

Betty shook her pretty head.

"I am afraid Bob would object," she murmured.

"Why should he object?" Alice cried derisively. "And what right has he? It is a shame the way he keeps you cooped up in this miserable three room flat. He ought to be glad if you got a chance to mingle with a few of your old friends. I bet he doesn't ask your permission when he wants to go out with some of his."

Continued in next number

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